

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Liberty and Justice for All

This is the theme of our celebration of 200 years of our nation's history. This past Sunday all of you were challenged with the liturgy of our special Bicentennial Mass which proclaimed this message:



"Welcome, brothers and sisters, Christians and Americans, to our celebration of our 200th anniversary as a nation. We are here to give thanks for all good gifts and for all our good accomplishments, and to repent our failures and our sins. Liberty and justice for all remain our goals. The Christian Community, which celebrates and makes ready for the reign of God, is pledged by Baptism to keep these goals alive and to bring them to bear upon the problems of our times. We praise God, too, for the vision of faith, the vision of God's reign of peace and justice, which gives us hope and enables us to challenge anything that hinders liberty and justice for all, here and now. May God renew that baptismal commitment deeply within our hearts."

The special Bicentennial Mass was prepared by the Bishops' Committee on Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and has been approved by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. Good liturgies require careful planning. I admire the selection of Scriptural readings and the composition of prayers which offer all of us a meditation of thanksgiving for blessings

received and a challenge for failures which need correction.

The first reading from the Prophet Isaiah speaks of liberty and justice for all people as the conditions for peace, that is, of the conditions conducive to a life worthy of God's daughters and sons.

The second reading from the first letter of Peter (Peter 1:3-9) recognizes the evils and the sufferings of our times and praises God that, despite the present restrictions in our freedom, we have hope through Jesus of life that is flourishing, that offers us a new vision and a new birth.

The Gospel of John brings us the message of Jesus about our new life described in terms of love and a peace that differs from that of the world we know.

What does this Word of God have to say about our 200 years as a nation, as a people of great achievements and notable failures, as a dream that is still being translated into reality and still growing towards its promise? Is the Word of God congratulatory or is it critical and challenging?

Jesus is the Word of God. He is the one in whom all of us are made free. He is the Word that is in conflict with much that is characteristic of our world in which injustices so frequently prevail. We do not assemble to hear His Word congratulate us. For liturgy is prayer and the essence of prayer is humility which brings us to our knees as we recognize our human limitations. Yet, He does congratulate us

on our feeble steps and limited progress toward the liberation of all people. But, God's will for liberty and justice towers above the achievements of any nation in any age — goading, prodding, moving, inspiring us to change, to grow, to seek a fuller life for all the people.

The Word of God in 1976 remains as it will always be in any year of anniversary — critical and challenging. Jesus said to his disciples of every age, "Anyone who loves me will be true to my Word, and my Father will love him." That is where the love of the Christian has to be. Not for the world as it is, not for the nation as it is, but for Jesus and the kingdom and the world as it must become.

We celebrate the bicentennial of our nation, not merely as an anniversary of our independence and nationhood once achieved, but as a goal to be accomplished — a fuller and richer life for all, as a pledge of a new birth.

I especially love this prayer of our new liturgy:

"Father of all nations and ages, we recall the day when our country claimed its place among the family of nations.

For what has been achieved we give you thanks; For the work that still remains we ask your help. Grant that under your providence our country may share your blessings with all the peoples of the earth."

May the Lord bless us and keep us and may we be a people ever worthy of His blessing.

vatican news

The Prayer of Jesus

During the General Audience on Wednesday, 14 June, the Holy Father addressed the large assembly in the Nervi auditorium as follows.

In these times, in these days so busy with human events, we are still mindful of the spiritual cyclone that Pentecost was for the world and especially for the Church. We turn our thought again to prayer, to its legitimacy, its necessity, its procedure. We are well aware that the study of religions, the study of Christian prayer, the study of human psychology, have dwelt upon this expression of the human spirit.

This almost places in a quandary one who, from such a great mass of experiences, customs and literature, wishes to draw a comprehensive and guiding idea sufficient for the modern secular man to classify in the summary of a mental index-card that which it is enough to know on this subject, now alien to his empirical and positive mentality.

Accepting this imperious simplifying method, we conclude our reflection on prayer with two major propositions. These are: prayer, first, presupposes on God's side an interest, a listening to the voices addressed to him by man, that is, a "Providence" and, second, it presupposes on man's side, a hope, an expectation of being satisfied and helped.

Thus we see that we have, it is true, constructed the essential pattern of prayer, that is, a possible conversation between man and God, but that we still know very little, if anything, about the validity of this conversation.

Is it an imaginary hypothesis, or does it really establish a relationship; a bilateral relationship, a beneficial relationship?

Well, among the greatest favors that Christianity, faith, nay, more Jesus Christ in person conferred on mankind, there is precisely this real, valid, indispensable, very opportune prayer.

Christ established communication between man and God; and this communication, which prevails over all our marvellous modern technical and social communications, has as its first, normal expression, prayer. Praying means communicating with God.

Christ is himself this fundamental communication with the manifestation of himself. We enter the sanctuary of the exploration of who Christ is, the subject, today still, of tormented and, fundamentally, inevitably negative investigations for those who break with the Chalcedon definition of the one Person of the Word, living in two natures, divine and human.

Jesus himself is the most luminous example of prayer, which, documented in the Gospel, becomes for us the highway to prayer and spiritual life. People who follow him and believe are still tireless students in this school.

"By what way can I reach Christ and his message?", a well-known modern Catholic thinker asks himself; and he answers: "there is one very short and simple way: I look into the soul of Jesus as he prays, and I believe."

But, how, and when did Jesus pray? Oh, how beautiful and instructive an excursion into the Gospel pages would be, picking like wild flowers the almost incidental references to the Lord's prayer!

The evangelist Mark writes: "And rising up long before daybreak, he (Jesus) went out (probably it was Peter's house, at Capharnaum) and departed into a desert place, and there he prayed."

See, for example, after the multiplication of the loaves: "And when he had dismissed the crowd, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. And when it was late, he was alone."

The Lord's prayers, about which the Gospel informs us, would deserve such long meditation. The famous one, for example, in chapter XI of Matthew, which lets us "enter the deepest secret of his life": "At that time Jesus spoke and said, 'I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones.' And what can we say of the prayer that concludes the talks of the Last Supper? "And raising his eyes to heaven, he said, 'Father, the hour has come! Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee' . . . We recall it: it is the prayer for unity: "that all may be one." And then the triple groaning, heroic prayer at Gethsemane, just before the passion: "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me! Yet not my will but thine be done."

What a revelation not only of the drama of the Saviour's life, but also of the complexity and depth of human destinies, which even in their most tragic and mysterious expressions can be linked, by means of prayer, to the goodness, the mercy, the salvation deriving from God.

Pray, then, like Jesus. Pray intensely. Pray today: always in the confident communion that prayer has established between us and the Father. Because it is to a father, it is to the Father that our humble voice is addressed.

So let it be, always. With our apostolic blessing.

